
Definition.

B*Y the Absolute Authority of the Church, I understand a Power in Spiritual Matters, from which there can be no Appeal, to any Superior or Equal Judicature upon Earth, and to which every Christian (who makes a right Use of his private Judgment) is bound to submit. As for an Authority or Revelation, which excludes private Judgment, there was never any such as yet impos'd upon Men; for whatsoever has been reveal'd, was reveal'd to their Understandings, and yet their Privilege of examining, do's no wise derogate, from the Absolute Authority of that Revelation.*

Definition.

B*Y the Absolute Authority of the Church, I understand a Power in Spiritual Matters, from which there can be no Appeal, to any Superior or Equal Judicature upon Earth, and to which every Christian (who makes a right Use of his private Judgment) is bound to submit. As for an Authority or Revelation, which excludes private Judgment, there was never any such as yet impos'd upon Men; for whatsoever has been reveal'd, was reveal'd to their Understandings, and yet their Privilege of examining, do's no wise derogate, from the Absolute Authority of that Revelation.*

THE
Absolute Authority
OF THE
CHURCH,
In MATTERS relating to
CONSCIENCE,
AND

Men's Right of Judging for Themselves,
Reconcil'd,

After some Misunderstanding,

Occasion'd by

The Bishop of BANGOR's
Preservative and Sermon.

In Two Discourses, preach'd *June* the 2^d and
16th, at St. Margaret's Church, *Westminster.*

By ALEXANDER INNES, D.D.
Lecturer of that Parish.

L O N D O N :

Printed for John Morphew, near Stationers-Hall. 1717.

THE
 Absolute Authority
 OF THE
 CHURCH
 In Matters relating to
 CONSCIENCE
 AND

Mans Right of Judging for Themselves
 Rescinded



The Bishop of Eboraco's
 Preface and Sermon

In Two Discourses, preached June the 24 and
 14th, at St. Margarets Church, Westminster

By ALEXANDER INNES, D.D.
 Lecturer of the Parish.

LONDON:
 Printed for John Moxon, near Stationers-Hall, 1717.



THE
Absolute Authority
Of the
CHURCH, &c.

SERMON I.

St. Matth. XVIII. 17. the latter part.

*But if he Neglect to hear the Church, let him be
unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.*

I Need not insist long upon the Ex-
plication of these Words, seeing by
comparing them with some of the
preceding Verses, we may easily discover, that
our Blessed Saviour's design is to teach His
Followers, what Measures they were to take,

and to whom they were to have recourse, if they were unsuccessful in adjusting and reconciling the Differences, which might happen between them and any of their Brethren. In the 15th Verse he tells us, *If thy Brother shall trespass against thee* ; that is, if he cast any invidious Reflection upon thy Christian Character, or by Obloquy and Detraction wrong thee in thy Reputation, or any other way offend thee, *Go and tell him his Fault between thee and him alone*, reprove him in the Spirit of Meekness, and endeavour with all imaginable Gentleness and Lenity to reclaim and soften him, and bring him to a sense of the Injury he has done thee. But if this will not do, if this Method can make no Impression upon him, yet even in this Case thou art not to be thy own Judge and Avenger, but must move one Step farther, in order to convince him, by taking with thee *one or two more*, as Arbiters, or at least Witnesses, that according to the *Mosaical Law*, *In the Mouth of two or three Witnesses every Word may be established*: But if he Refuse or Neglect to Hear them, and to submit to their Arbitration, Then the last thing thou must do, is to *tell it to the Church* ; and if he neglect to hear the Church, if his Heart be so obdurate, so hard
and

and impenetrable, that he will not listen to her Directions, nor own Her Authority, without acknowledging of which he could never have been admitted into her Communion, Then indeed he is in a miserable Condition, he is to be cast out of her Society, and thou art to look upon him as a *Heathen and a Publican* ; as one with whom None of her Members is to have any sort of Intercourse or Correspondence ; as one excluded from a Participation of all those Blessings and Privileges, which Christ has purchased for His *Church* at the expence of his most Precious Blood ; and in a word, as one cut off from being a Member of His *Mystical Body*.

If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.

In speaking to which Words, I shall in the

1st Place enquire what is here meant by the *Church*, and who those are to whose Authority and Arbitration Christians are bound in Conscience to submit.

2. I shall examin whether or not this Power and Authority be continued in the *Church* to this Day.

3. I shall

or 3. I shall consider the Nature of the Punishment to be inflicted on an Obstinate and Impenitent Offender, *Let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.*

In speaking to each of these particulars, I shall take occasion to examine and discuss some Objections, that have been rais'd of late against this Power and Authority of the Church, which have a natural Tendency to sap and undermine her Foundations, and to extirpate Christianity it self out of the World.

I. First of all then I shall enquire what is here meant by the *Church*, and who those are, to whose Authority and Arbitration Christians are bound in Conscience to submit.

Now by the *Church* in this place we must needs understand a *Visible Society* of Christians, and not an *Invisible Judge*, which some People imagine to be in every Man's own Breast for his Guidance and Direction, and sufficient to entitle him to the Favour of God, and to procure his eternal Happiness without any Interposal or Assistance from another. For here the Crime is suppos'd to be flagrant and notorious, the *Witnesses* are represented to be real, and the *Number* of them is expressly defin'd; Now to imagin, that for determin-
ing

ing the Differences among Men, which are *Visible*, there must be an Appeal to an *Invisible Judge*, or, which is the same, to the *Kingdom of Christ* within, is what is as much inconsistent with Common Sense, as with our *Saviour's Words* in the Text. For at this rate, the Controversie could never be determin'd, each of the contending Parties having the *Judge* within himself, and equally pleading a Title to the Favour of God, on the account of his Candour and Sincerity.

Here likewise, the *Offending Brother* is represented to have transgress'd the *Laws of Christ*, by trespassing against his Neighbour. But if the *Church* mention'd in the Text, has no *Power or Authority* to interpret the *Laws of Christ*, and to bind the Consciences of Men, to what purpose is it, to tell it to the *Church*? Or why should any Man, tho' never so guilty, or never so much expos'd to Her Censures, be look'd upon by us as an *Heathen and a Publican*; if she cannot determine what is contrary to the *Laws of Christ*, and what is not; which she can never be suppos'd to do, unless she have a *Power and Authority* to interpret those *Laws*, and to impose Her Interpretation upon the Consciences of Men?

By

By this time I hope it appears, that there is something like a *Visible Church*, that has some seeming Authority and Power to determine the Differences among Christians. And for explaining what this Church is, I shall only make use of the 19th Article of our own, in which we are told, that *the Visible Church of Christ is a Congregation of faithful Men, in which the pure Word of God is preach'd, and the Sacraments be duly administred, according to Christ's Ordinance, in all things that of Necessity are requisite to the same.*

Now this Definition naturally leads me to shew you, who those are to whose Arbitration and Authority Christians are bound in Conscience to submit, namely, the Bishops and Governours of the Church of Christ; those by whom the Power of the Keys, and of administering the Holy Sacraments, has been perpetuated and continued in the Church of Christ, from the Days of the Apostles to this present Time; and tho' what a Learned Pre-

late has lately observed of the Church*, may be justly applied to this Sacred Order, namely, *That it hath been so diversified by the various Alterations it hath undergone, that 'tis almost impossible to Number up the many inconsistent Images that*

* Pag. 10. of his Sermon.

that have come, by some Additions, to be united together in it. Yet 'tis to be hop'd, that God, of his infinite Mercy, will continue to us a *Succession* of Orthodox *Governours*, which in the Best and Purest Ages of Christianity, was lookt upon to be so indispensably necessary to the Constitution of a Christian Church.

This *Regular Succession*, (God be prais'd) is so far from deserving the hard Names, of a *Trifle*, *Nicety*, *Dream*, *Invention* of Men, and the like, which some unthinking Men have opprobriously branded it with ; That we can clearly prove it against them and all their Adherents, both by the Unquestionable Records of the Christian Church, and the very reason of the Thing, and the nature of that Sacred Institution. For if ever the *Regular Succession* of the Christian Priesthood was interrupted, then there must have been a Time, since the Days of our Blessed Saviour and his *Apostles*, in which there was no Power of administering the *Sacraments* and preaching the *Gospel*, and consequently no Church ; and if so, then must our Saviour's Promise have fail'd, of being with his Apostles and their Lawful Successors, even to the End of the World.

It were easie to produce Innumerable Testimonies from the Primitive * Fathers, for proving this Regular and Uninterrupted Succession, and how much every Modest and Good Christian thought himself bound in Conscience to follow St. Paul's Direction, *Heb. XIII. v. 17. Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves, for they watch for your Souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with Joy and not with Grief.*

But I shall not insist upon This, but proceed to the

II. Particular I propos'd to speak to, namely, to enquire if there be any *Power and Authority* in the Church at this Day, which can bind the Consciences of Men. It must be really confess'd, and with the greatest Sorrow acknowledg'd, that 'tis very hard, and almost impossible, to bind the Consciences of some People. The World is grown up to such a pitch of Wickedness, and Infidelity; and every thing that is Sacred so much disregarded, if not ridicul'd; and Men's Consciences are become so ungovernable by the *Laws* of God or his Church, and so tame, pliable,

* They are ready, if required.

pliable, and submissive to the Blandishments of Worldly Honour and Preferment, that neither repeated Oaths, nor Subscriptions to *Articles, Creeds, or Canons*, are of sufficient Force to keep some Men within the Bounds of their most Solemn Engagements, or restrain them, from spreading their infectious Contagion, among the most *Sacred Audiences*, and most *August Assemblies*; and after all this, They hope to bring themselves off by their *Sincerity*. As for their *Sincerity* in breaking the most Solemn Obligations, in Civility and good Manners we shall not question it. But Gracious God! Who could have imagin'd, that such an impure *Sacrifice* should have been offer'd to Thee, by way of *Attonement*; to Thee, *who art the Searcher of Hearts and Trier of Reins, and knowest all Men's Thoughts afar off*? Was not *St. Paul*, do you imagine, very *sincere* when he persecuted the Church; and the *Jews*, when they crucified our *Blessed Saviour*? But did their *Sincerity* justify them before God, or entitle them to his Favour, when they only were conducted by a blind Zeal, and follow'd the Dictates of an erroneous Conscience? And to convince us that there is a culpable *Sincerity*, as well as an inexcusable Ignorance, our *Blessed Lord* hath

assured us, that as *He, who knoweth his Master's Will and does it not, shall be beaten with many Stripes*; even so *he that knoweth not his Master's Will, and does it not, shall be beaten with fewer Stripes*. Both are to be punish'd, tho' not in an equal Degree.

But to return to the *Authority* of the Church, after this Necessary Digression from it. We have the Misfortune to be attack'd on all Hands about the *Authority* of our own: The *Romanists* claiming to themselves, the sole Privilege of Determining all Controversies relating to Faith or Practice; and that on the account of their *Infallibility*; and denying us the least Share of *Authority* and *Power*, because we have not so much Confidence as they.

My Design is not at present, to engage in this Controversie with them, but I shall only observe to you their specious Way of Reasoning, when they would convince us of their *Infallibility*. For how do they prove it? Why forsooth, by the *Authority* of the *Scripture*; And how do they prove the *Authority* of the *Scripture*? Even the same way, by the *Infallibility* of the Church. And besides, there is another Consideration I would offer concerning them,

them, with which I shall leave them; namely, if it be true which they say, that without a *Visible Infallible Judge*, Controversies can never be decided; then by consequence, the Controversie concerning this *Visible Infallible Judge* can never be determin'd; because, on supposition, there is none as yet agreed on.

And happy were it for our *Church*, if she had none but the Church of *Rome* to deal with, no Enemies to encounter but those of her *Communion*. We have carried on a *Religious War*, God be thanked, most Successfully against her; We have shewn how Corruptions and Innovations were introduc'd by degrees into her *Communion*; in what several Periods they sprung up, and who they were that oppos'd them.

In a word, the Learned Writers of our *Church*, have so baffled all their Objections, and so clearly, solidly, and I may say, unanswerably confuted all their Arguments, that no *Church* could ever have had the face to make a Reply, but one pretending to *Infallibility*. But alas! My Brethren, our most Dangerous Enemies come not from the *Church* of *Rome* as formerly; or if we be so lucky as to discover them, we are not afraid of them. If it were a profess'd *Enemy*

or

or a Stranger, that had wounded our Church, she could easily have *born it* ; But it was her own *Familiar Friend*, whom she trusted, who sits at her Table, and eats of her Bread, that has lift up his Heel against her : Who has lately deliver'd such *Doctrines* to the World, that nothing can be imagin'd of more pernicious Tendency, except that pretended * Vindication ; by which he in vain attempts to defend them : Who, by the *Mixture*, and *deceitful* Confusion of four or five Words, (which one would imagin, by the use that is made of them, had lost their proper Signification, and assum'd to themselves a *Magical Sound* ; such as *properly*, *absolutely*, *unlimited*, *unconditional*, and so forth :) Who, I say, by such an artificial Mixture of *Sounds*, has endeavour'd to *Conjure* the Church out of her Just Authority, and at the same time to skreen himself, under their Shelter, from the Imputation of *Hereſie* and *Schiſm* ; as appears from this *Demonstration*, which, with a very small Change of the Words, I have borrow'd from a late *Preservative* †, *Take away from him those Words, and he is so far from being Justified, that he is highly to be*

* Answer to Dr. Snape.

† Page 85.

be condemn'd for what he has wrote ; give him but those Words again, and he'll make the best Shift he can to defend himself, tho' at the Expence of the Church, and of that Eminent and Sacred Character, which her unguarded Indulgence, (too prodigal of her Favours) induces her sometimes, to confer undeservedly upon Men. This is he, who has told us, that tho' the Apostles had a Power over the Consciences of Men, and of Interpreting the Laws of Christ, as being Infallible, and immediately directed and influenc'd by the Spirit of God (tho' in some places † he speaks but very dubiously of this too ;) yet the Church now-a-days can claim no such Authority to herself, and that for these following Reasons, which for Method's sake, I have digested into this Order :

1st. Because the Church at this day is not Infallible ; and for Fallible Men to pretend to dictate Infallibly to the Consciences of others, appears to Him a manifest Contradiction.

2^{ly}. Because

† Page 12^d of his SERMON.

or a Stranger, that had wounded our Church, she could easily have *born* it ; But it was her own Familiar Friend, whom she trusted, who sits at her Table, and eats of her Bread, that has lift up his Heel against her : Who has lately deliver'd such *Doctrines* to the World, that nothing can be imagin'd of more pernicious Tendency, except that pretended * Vindication ; by which he in vain attempts to defend them : Who, by the Mixture, and deceitful Confusion of four or five Words, (which one would imagin, by the use that is made of them, had lost their proper Signification, and assum'd to themselves a Magical Sound ; such as properly, absolutely, unlimited, unconditional, and so forth :) Who, I say, by such an artificial Mixture of Sounds, has endeavour'd to Conjure the Church out of her Just Authority, and at the same time to skreen himself, under their Shelter, from the Imputation of *Hereſie* and *Schiſm* ; as appears from this *Demonstration*, which, with a very small Change of the Words, I have borrow'd from a late *Preservative* †, Take away from him those Words, and he is so far from being justified, that he is highly to be

* Answer to Dr. Snape.

† Page 85.

be condemn'd for what he has wrote ; give him but those Words again, and he'll make the best Shift he can to defend himself, tho' at the Expence of the Church, and of that Eminent and Sacred Character, which her unguarded Indulgence, (too prodigal of her Favours) induces her sometimes, to confer undeservedly upon Men. This is he, who has told us, that tho' the Apostles had a Power over the Consciences of Men, and of Interpreting the Laws of Christ, as being Infallible, and immediately directed and influenc'd by the Spirit of God (tho' in some places † he speaks but very dubiously of this too ;) yet the Church now-a-days can claim no such Authority to herself, and that for these following Reasons, which for Method's sake, I have digested into this Order :

1st. *Because the Church at this day is not Infallible ; and for Fallible Men to pretend to dictate Infallibly to the Consciences of others, appears to Him a manifest Contradiction.*

2^{ly}. *Because*

† Page 12ⁱ of his SERMON.

2ly. Because Christ's Church is a Spiritual Kingdom, of which He Himself is King alone, and Supreme Legislator; He has never interpos'd in this Kingdom since the first Promulgation of his Gospel; He has left no Deputies or Vice-Gerents, to interpret his Laws so absolutely, as to impose their Sense of them on the Consciences of Men. Temporal Rewards and Punishments are inconsistent with the Nature of this Spiritual Kingdom.

And, 3dly. That for the Church to assume any Power of interpreting the Laws of Christ, and imposing her Sense of them upon other Men's Consciences, is the same as to overturn the very Basis and Ground-Work of the Reformation, when Men did shake off the Authority of the Church, and every one trusted to his own private Judgment, that is, Judg'd for himself.

I am very much mistaken, if all that has been advanc'd in a late *Preservative* and *Sermon*, is not reducible to some of those Heads I have mention'd; and if I can make it appear that there is neither good Sense,
nor

nor sound Divinity, in any or all of them together, But that they are in every respect Fallacious and Sophistical; I hope that the Church's Authority, will suffer no Diminution from what Her pretended Friends (but real Enemies) are able with their most enrag'd Malice to say against her. I begin with the

1st, Namely, That the Apostles were Infallible, as being under the Immediate Direction and Influences of God's Holy Spirit; But the Church now-a-days is not Infallible, and therefore, for Fallible Men to pretend to dictate Infallibly to the Consciences of others, appears to be a Manifest Contradiction.

Now in order to discover the Weakness and Fallacy of this Argument, be pleas'd to consider with me these following Particulars.

1. Tho' the Apostles were under the immediate Direction and Influences of God's Holy Spirit, yet they thought fit to enjoin and recommend several Things to Christians, which they did not pretend was owing to immediate Inspiration *, and which the Church by Her

* 1 Cor. 7. Ch. I only give my Judgment (says St. Paul) I have no Commandment of the Lord.

C

Ambo

Authority, without any Disrespect to them, or Blemish to her self, has since alter'd, as not being things of a perpetual Obligation; such is that of St. Paul concerning Marriage, our Abstinence from Things strangled, and from Blood, our Receiving the Blessed Sacrament fasting, whereas in the *Apostles Days*, the Love-Feasts were constantly join'd with it; This, in my Opinion, evidently shews us, that the Church has still had an Authority of Interpreting, what Laws and Customs were perpetually obligatory upon Christians, and what were not; and that no Person till now, ever found fault with her upon that account, which gives a shrewd Suspicion, that what has been lately advanc'd against this Power, is not supported by Truth; Because, *whatsoever is new in Religion, is certainly False.*

To pretend here, that tho' the Church may be allow'd a Power in some indifferent Matters, yet she can claim no *absolute and unconditional Power*, in those relating to *Eternal Salvation*, signifies nothing to the purpose; For if an *absolute and unconditional Power*, be taken in the Largest and most Extensive Signification, the *Apostles* themselves were not vested with any such Power. For their Commission was limited only to preach that Gospel, to the World,

World, which they had heard from our *Blessed Saviour's* own Mouth; and they were not empower'd, nay, they were expressly forbid to preach any other.

The whole Tenour of this Gospel, depends upon Conditions to be perform'd by Men, without which, they can have no Share of those Blessings and Privileges, which are tender'd to Mankind in *Christ Jesus*.

Neither did the *Apostles* in This Sense, assume an *Absolute Power* over the *Consciences* of Men, if by that is meant, forcing their *Consciences*, which is a Contradiction in it self; They had a *Power* indeed of Directing, and Instructing them, and of Censuring impenitent Offenders, which the *Church of Christ* has always exercis'd since, and I hope will perpetually enjoy, tho' there were no such Words, as *absolute, unconditional, or unlimited* in the World.

But 2dly, We must take care to distinguish between these two things, The *Church's* being *Infallible*, and her knowing some things to be *Infallibly True and Certain*.

To illustrate this by some familiar Instances; Tho' I be not infallible, yet I infallibly know the Being of a God, and that one

convicted of *Blasphemy* before a proper Judicature, deserves to be punish'd with the greatest Severity ; Tho' I am not *Infallible*, yet this I know to be certainly true, that whoever takes the Liberty to speak of the ever-blessed *Trinity*, or of the Worship due to the *Eternal Father*, ought with the greatest Caution, and most profound Reverence to express himself in clear and distinct Terms, that do not admit of a * *Dubious Interpretation*, lest while some believe, by straining his Words a little, that he is exclaiming against the *Romish Idolatry*, others may more naturally, and more justly conclude, that He is preaching against the *Creeeds* of the *Christian Church*, which he himself has subscrib'd. In like manner, to come a little nearer, Tho' I am not *Infallible*, yet this I know to be *Infallibly* true, that tho' the *Church of England*, usurps no *Tyrannical Authority* over the *Consciences* of Men, yet She forbids no Person to be a Member of her *Communion*, upon his voluntary agreeing to those *Terms* and *Conditions*, which She has prescrib'd for that purpose ; If those *Conditions* are *sinful*, why does he embrace them ? And if they are not *sinful*, why does he exclaim

* *Vid.* pag. 5, 6. of his SERMON.

claim against Her *Authority* for imposing 'em? Did I say imposing them? when he himself did *Voluntarily* and *Freely*, and in the most *solemn* manner, give his *Assent* and *Consent* to them, and continues to *impose* them upon Others, with the same *Sincerity* and *Conscience* perhaps, with which he inveighs against the *Authority* of that *Church* which gave him his Own.

In a Word, tho' the Church be not *Infal-
lible* (that is, totally exempted from all Possibility of Error) yet She knows *Infal-
libly* the Truth and Certainty of the *Christian Re-
velation*; and if so, then She must know as *Infal-
libly* the *Laws* of Christ, and the Sense of them, which are a *Part* of that *Revelation*; Seeing to have an *Infal-
lible* Knowledge of Christ's *Laws*, without having an *Infal-
lible* Assurance of their Meaning, is down-right Non-
sense, and a palpable Contradiction.

And besides this, tho' there were not such a Degree of Certainty in the Church, as I have been endeavouring to establish, yet that Safety and Exemption from *Error*, which is in Her, is certainly more to be relied on, than that which depends on a Man's private *Judg-
ment*, let it be attended with ever so much
Sincerity;

Sincerity; and therefore a modest, and prudent Man, will be always inclinable to choose the safest Way; as a Patient, (tho' his Physician cannot promise *Infallibly* to cure him of his Distemper) yet he will rather trust to his Skill for the Means of his Recovery, than to his own *Judgment*, in such a Case; and tho' no Physician can *absolutely and unconditionally* force a sick Man to take Physick, yet he certainly has *Authority* to prescribe to him for his *Recovery*, and the *Obstinacy* of the one, diminishes nothing of the *Authority* of the other.

To all this I may add, that tho' the Extraordinary Operations of the *Spirit* have ceas'd long ago, yet we know infallibly, that the same *Spirit* in a more silent and ordinary way, influences and animates the Church; and that Christ, who is *ascended into Heaven*, and exalted at the *Right Hand of God*, has not left his Church *comfortless*, but hath assur'd us, that where *two or three*, as I hope we are all at this time, *gather'd together in his Name*, he will be in the midst of them.

To conclude this Point; If the Church has no *absolute Power* of *Interpreting* and *Ab-solving*, because she is not *infallible*; For the same Reason, there is an end of the *Christian Priesthood*,

Priesthood, and of all sacred Administrations. No *Minister* can offer up the publick Prayers of the *Church*, in name of the *People*, because he is not *infallibly* assur'd, that every one, or indeed any one of the *Congregation* joins with him, in his Addresses to the *Throne of Grace*.

No Person can lawfully administer, the Blessed Sacrament of the *Eucharist* to *Christians*, because it being a *Sign* and *Seal* of the Remission of *Sins*, he cannot be *infallibly* assur'd, that their Repentance is so sincere, as to entitle them to Pardon and Forgiveness, by receiving the *Body* and *Blood* of our Blessed Saviour.

All which, with a great many more that might be mention'd, are horrid Consequences, and yet plainly deducible, from that Argument against the *Authority* of the *Church*, on the account of her not pretending to *Infallibility*. I proceed now to the

II^d Objection against the Church's Power, which is this,

Christ's Church is a Spiritual Kingdom, of which he Himself is King alone, and Supreme

preme Legislator ; he hath never interpos'd in this Kingdom since the first Promulgation of his Gospel ; He has left no Deputies or Vice-Gerents, to interpret his Laws, or impose their Sense of them on other People's Consciences ; Temporal Rewards and Punishments are inconsistent with the Nature of this Spiritual Kingdom.

Now in order to discover the Fallacy of this Assertion, be pleas'd to observe with me,

That Christ, God Blessed for ever, is indeed Head of his Church, and Supreme Legislator of his Kingdom ; but that he has never interpos'd in it, since the first Promulgation of the Gospel, is what I absolutely deny ; The Apostles, as is agreed on all hands, were immediately inspir'd by the Spirit of Truth, and he must be a very great Stranger to Antiquity, that does not know that the *Xaeiouara*, the Extraordinary Gifts and Operations of the Holy Ghost continued in the Primitive Church at least 240 Years, after the first Promulgation of the Gospel ; even at a Time, when the Bishops of the Christian Church, in a State of Persecution, were

were dignified, with the Title of * *Vicegerents*, and *Representatives* of Christ himself, who had an *Authority* to interpret his *Laws*, and to impose their *Sense* of them on the *Consciences* of others, or at least to expel *Gain-sayers* out of the Church's *Communion*.

And that no Person may think this an *Usurpation* of Christ's Kingdom, let us reflect, that there is a *Conscience* towards Men, as St. Paul † speaks, † *Acts* 24. 16. as well as a *Conscience* towards God; as to that towards God, he himself is the only Judge of it, and no Man or Society of Men, can take notice of it, because they cannot know it.

* Cyprian. Ep. ad Cæcil. *Ille Sacerdos Vice Christi verè fungitur, Qui id quod Christus fecit Imitatur.*

Ep. 55. al. 59. ad Cornel. p. 129. *Neque enim aliunde Hæreses orta sunt, aut nata sunt Schismata, quam inde quod Sacerdoti non obtemperatur, nec unus in Ecclesia ad tempus Sacerdos, & ad tempus Judex Vice Christi cogitatur.* — Rigalt. in Loc. *Ecce autem Episcopos ævo jam Cypriani Vicarios Christi.*

The Author of the *Constitutions*, Lib. 2. cap. 26. calls the Bishop *ὁ ἀντὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ*.

They are likewise stil'd Successors of the Apostles, in St. Cyprian's time. *Cypr. Ep. 69. al. 66. ad Florent. Id. Ep. 42. al. 45. ad Cornel. Firmil. Ep. 75. ap. Cypr. p. 225.*

Theodoret says exprelly, that Bishops were call'd *Apostles*, *Com. in 1 Tim. III. 1.* As also, *Com. in Phil. I. 1.* *It. in Phil. II. 25.* An infinite Number of such Passages might be produced, but those I have mention'd are sufficient for my purpose.

D

But

But then for a *Conscience void of Offence towards Men*, which is likewise recommended by the *Laws of Christ*, this is what falls properly under the Church's Cognizance, and the Violation of it, under her *Censure*. And I'll venture to affirm, that this one *Distinction* carefully applied, will extricate People's Minds from all those Mazes and Labyrinths, of too refin'd a Spirituality of *Christ's Kingdom*, which some late Discourses have involv'd them in.

From thence we will perceive, the Insufficiency of their *Hypothesis*, when they talk so loudly of *Christ's* being the *only Judge* of a Man's *Conscience*; if they mean of his *Conscience towards God*, we readily grant it, and so far we are agreed; But then we must remember, that Men may be the *Judges* of a *Conscience towards Men*, which consists in *Words and Actions*, and not in *Thought* only. To illustrate this more clearly: So long as Men entertain in their own Breasts only, Heretical or Schismatical Opinions, God only, is the *Judge* of that *Conscience*, such as it is, and Men have nothing to do with it; But if they come to broach and propagate their Heterodox Opinions, and by
that

that means labour to destroy any of the Brethren for whom Christ died, and to disturb the Peace and Unity of the Church; This is a Conscience towards Men, tho' not void of Offence, and falls directly, under the Cognizance and Censure of our Spiritual Governours.

Besides, if there must be a Conscience towards Men, as well as towards God, this will convince us, that tho' Eternal Rewards and Punishments, are the principal Hinges of the Christian Religion, yet they are no wise inconsistent, with those that are Temporal; We are compos'd of Souls and Bodies, and bound to glorify God in our Bodies and Spirits, which are his; and therefore while we are Christians, we must remember that we are Men likewise; and seeing there are Duties incumbent upon both the Parts of which we are compounded; Sobriety, Chastity, and Temperance, with Regard to the one, and the Love of God and our Neighbour, with relation to the other; and our most Gracious God has made use of Arguments for exciting us to our Duty, fitted and adapted to work upon both; This will convince us, that Godliness is profitable for all things, having the Promise of the Life that now is, as well, as of that which is to come.

And

And to convince us, that *Temporal Punishments*, as well as *Eternal*, are not inconsistent with the Nature of *Christ's Kingdom*, we find that *St. Peter* smote *Ananias* and *Sapphira* with Sudden Death; and *St. Paul*, *Elymas* the Sorcerer with Blindness; and if our Blessed Saviour himself, thought fit to scourge the Buyers and Sellers of Oxen, and Sheep, and Doves, out of the Temple, how much more do the Buyers and Sellers of the Temple it self, deserve to be scourged out of the Synagogue?

The other Particulars which I propos'd, shall be consider'd in my following Discourse.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, &c. Amen.



THE
Absolute Authority
OF THE
CHURCH

IN MATTERS relating to
CONSCIENCE,

AND

Men's Right of Judging for Themselves,
Reconcil'd after some

MISUNDERSTANDING

Occasion'd by

The Bishop of *BANGOR*'s

Preservative and Sermon.

In Two Discourses, Preach'd *June the 2d and*
16th, at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster.

By *ALEXANDER INNES, D.D.*
Lecturer of that Parish.

DISCOURSE II.

LONDON:

Printed for *John Morphew, near Stationers-Hall.* 1717.

THE
Absolute Authority
OF THE
CHURCH
IN MATTERS
CONSCIENCE

Man's Right of Judging for Themselves
Reasoned and Answered

Occasioned by
The Bishop of BANGOR's
Treatise and Sermon

In Two Discourses, Preach'd June the 24 and
10th, at St. Asaph's Church, Westmorland.

By ALEXANDER LIVES, D.D.
Rector of St. Asaph.

DISCOVERED

LONDON:

Printed for John Alcock, near Stationers-Hall. 1717.



THE
Absolute Authority
 OF THE
CHURCH, &c.

SERMON II.

St. Matth. xviii. 17. the latter Part.
*But if he Neglect to hear the Church,
 let him be unto thee as a heathen
 Man and a Publicane.*



IN my former Discourse upon
 these Words, I endeavour'd, and
 I hope successfully, to vindicate
 the Authority of the Church, in op-
 position to some modern Doctrines, advanc'd
 by

by a Person of an eminent Character in our own, by showing you in the

1st Place, That the *Church's* not pretending to *Infallibility*, is no Argument against her *Absolute Power* and *Authority*, in directing and *Instructing* the Consciences of Men, and censuring contumacious and obstinate Offenders.

And in the 2^d, By discovering to you, the *Fallacy* and weakness of that *Argument*, (plausible as it is) by which it is pretended, That *Christ* is the *Sole Judge of Men's Consciences*, and that no Man or Society of Men, can take any Cognizance of them; and this I did, by distinguishing with *St. Paul*, *Acts xxiv. 16.* Into a *Conscience towards God*, and a *Conscience towards Men*, both which are absolutely necessary to Salvation. God alone is the Judge of the *Former*, and Men have nothing to do with it; but the *Latter*, which consists in Words and Actions, and not in Thought only, is what falls properly under the *Church's* Cognizance, and if not void of Offence, under her Censure.

From hence I inferr'd, that tho' *Eternal Rewards* and *Punishments*, are the principal *Hinges* of the *Christian Religion*, yet they are no wise *Exclusive* of, or inconsistent with those that are *Temporal*, *Godliness* being
pro-

profitable for all Things. having a Promise of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

I shall now make some further Observations upon each of these Particulars, and then proceed to the other Heads which I propos'd to consider,

And 1st, That the Church has an absolute Power of interpreting the Laws of Christ, is evident from the 28th of St. Matthew's Gospel, 18, 19, 20 Verses ; And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all Power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth ; Go ye therefore, and Teach (or rather Disciple) all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all Things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you alway, even unto the World. Here I think, there is as positive and as Absolute a Commission to Preach the Gospel, as can possibly be imagin'd, and for the same Reason, a Power and Authority, in Proportion to the Extent and Universality of this Commission, for interpreting and expounding the Laws of Christ ; seeing to have an absolute Power of Preaching, without an equal Power of Interpreting, is such a Piece of inconsistency and contradiction, as none can have

have the Confidence to maintain, except one, who is capable of such a notorious *Sacrilege*, as to rob *Prayer* of the *Spirit*, and a *visible Church* of her *Body*.

If Our blessed Saviour then vested his *Church*, with a *Power* and *Authority* of interpreting his *Laws*, and of *Instructing* and *Directing* Men's *Consciences*, we must in Reason conclude, that there is a *Duty* incumbent on *Christians*, answering and corresponding to that *Authority*, by which those *Laws* are propounded, namely of submitting to, and acquiescing in that *Instruction*, *Direction* and *Interpretation*, which is back'd and supported, by such an *Authority*.

To pretend here, that there can be no such *absolute Power* of *Interpreting* in the *Church*, because every *Christian* has a *Right* to *Judge* for himself, this is a * *Noble Claim*

* Answer to Dr. Snape, p. 44.

indeed, if it could be made out.

But pray has every *Christian* a *Capacity* to *Judge* for himself, and if he has not, how can he have a *Right* to *Judge* without a *Capacity*? Or what will this *Right* signify, in *Matters* relating to the *Favour* of *God*, and *Eternal Salvation*, if he do's not know how to apply it, or what use to make of it? But People who can tell us, in a very magisterial,

sterial, tho' unaccountable manner, that for Men to act, by Virtue of a Commission deriv'd from our Blessed Saviour, or to interpret his Laws, by an Authority granted by him, is *Reigning in their own Kingdom*, and not in *Christ's*, and a *direct Usurpation* of his *Legislative Authority*; we are not to be surpriz'd, if such People can with the same Degree of Confidence, and probability, assure us, that every Christian has a *Right to Judge* for himself, whether he has a Capacity or nor, or in other Words, a *Right to do that which is impossible*.

But besides, let us consider, that as the Spirit of God, do's not act so forcibly and irresistably on Men's Minds, as to deprive them of the Liberty and Freedom of thinking, which is so inseparable from their Nature: no more does the Church of Christ, which is influenc'd and animated by the same good Spirit, pretend by her Authority, to impose *Doctrines* on the Consciences of Men, or to force their Belief in such a manner, as to deprive them of the Exercise of Reason, but only prescribes such Rules and Directions, which if attended to, will prevent or Remedy those Errors, and Mistakes, to which Men may be expos'd, by depending too much on
their

their own private Judgments: and as Men may Resist and Grieve the holy Spirit of God, without diminishing or lessening his Authority, so may Christians be so wicked, as to oppose, and resist the Laws of Christ, as explain'd by the Church, without diminishing the Authority which she has, for interpreting those Laws.

The Jews made so bad an Use of their private Judgment, and arriv'd to such a Pitch of Obstinacy and Incredulity, as to be Proof against our Saviour's holy Life, powerful Doctrine, and stupendous Miracles, but will any Man say that their Unbelief did any wise derogate from our blessed Lord's Authority of publishing a new Revelation to the World? When the Evidences he gave for his Divine Mission, were unquestionable Proofs of his Divinity, and at the same time, an aggravation of the guilt, of that Rebellious People, who disbeliev'd him; according to our Saviour's Words 15th, Jo. 24 verse. *If I had not done among them the Works which none other Man d d, they had not had sin, but now have they seen and hated both me and my Father.*

Our Blessed Lord, do's not blame the Jews for making use of their Reason, but only condemns them, for rejecting his Authority, and preferring their Prejudices and Partiality,

to

to the *Rule*, according to which they should have *Judg'd* of his *Doctrine*, namely, the *Miracles*, which he wrought in its *Confirmation*.

In like manner, the *Church of Christ*, do's not deny Men the Use of *private Judgment*, in *Matters of Salvation*, but only blames those who abuse it, in *Opposition* to her *Authority*, and will not submit to those *Rules* which She prescribes, for their *Conduct* and *Direction*.

I might add to this, that however some Men may pretend to magnify, the Use of *private Judgment*, in *Exclusion* of the *Church's Power*, yet the *Canon of Scripture*, is what no Man can at this Time determine, without depending on the *Authority* of the *Church*, and the *Testimony* of the *Primitive Fathers*. There is no passage of *Holy Writ*, that can give us Light in this Matter, no *Text* in the *whole Bible*, by which we can be inform'd, what *Books* are *Canonical* and what are not, and consequently in this at least, *private Judgment*, is forc'd to pay the greatest *Submission* and *Veneration* to the *Authority* of the *Church*, as being that *Channel*, thro' which the *Canon of Scripture*, has been convey'd to us, and with-

out which, Men of themselves, could never have found out those *Laws*, according to which they must be *Judg'd* at the last Day. And tho' some Men, upon very small Acquaintance with the *Primitive Fathers*, are very familiar with their Characters, and seem to undervalue their *Authority*, yet if we had none of their *Comments* upon the sacred *Text*, no Writings of theirs, to inform us, what has been done, or *interpreted* in the *Church of Christ*, since the *first Promulgation* of the Gospel, to this Day. In this Case, every one must acknowledge, that we should have been very much in the Dark, about the *Sense* and Meaning of a great many Places of Scripture, which now appear plain, and obvious, by the *Interpretation* which those venerable Fathers of Antiquity have left us; whose *Authority* when vilified, or exclaim'd against by any Man, it is a certain Sign, that their *Authority* is likewise against him, and *Principles of Resistance* are indeed of a vast Extent, when they are calculated so, as to reach the *Dead*, as well as the *Living*.

But 2dly, That I may use St. Paul's Words, 2 Cor. x. 5. and cast down *Imaginations*, and every high Thing that *Exalteth* itself,

self, against the Knowledge of God, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ and his Church. I beg leave to offer to you this following Consideration ; That the Authority of the Church, in Interpreting the Laws of Christ, and binding the Consciences of Men, is to be submitted to, and depended on, even according to our Adversaries, till once private Judgment, come to determine otherwise.

Now if I can show you, that a Man by using his *private Judgment*, is never capable of fixing or determining himself, when he renounces and leaves the *Authority of the Church*, I believe *private Judgment* itself, must at last be brought to her Obedience.

For making this good, be pleas'd to consider with me, that every Man, in his Enquiry after those Truths that relate to the *Favour of God, and Eternal Salvation*, ought to take all the Precaution imaginable, before he lay any thing down, as a *Principle of Conscience* ; that he be not deceiv'd, either thro' *Ignorance, Partiality or Self-Conceit* ; because in a Matter of so great Importance, his Mistake may be of the most dangerous Consequence. Now no Man is capable of doing this, without making Use of all the

Helps and Assistances, which are necessary for enlightning his Mind, and directing his *Conscience*; by comparing his Thoughts with those of other Men, by searching and finding out the true Meaning of the *Laws of Christ*, by reading and comparing all those *Writings*, that are necessary for understanding them, and at length, by forming a right Judgment upon what he has *heard*, and *read*, and *compar'd*, after all this strict and impartial Examination.

But who is sufficient for these Things? What Man alive, who Renounces the *Authority* of the Church, can Answer to God and his own *Conscience*, that he has made use of all those *Helps and Assistances* which I have mention'd? Or how is it possible for him to do it? Can he with any Colour of *Truth* or *Reason* say, that he has exactly pitch'd upon the Time for settling his *Principles*, and that there is no farther Occasion to *deliberate*, before he *determine*? That he has found out a fix'd and immutable *Standard*, by which he certainly knows, that he will never alter his Opinion, in those *Matters* to which he (perhaps unadvisedly,) affixes the *Sacred* and *venerable* Name of *Conscience*? That he has convers'd
with

with all those Men that are necessary for his Information, and that such a Number, and no more, is sufficient for giving him Light, in those *Principles*, which he has Espous'd, in Opposition to the Church's Authority? May he not be mistaken, in the Judgment he has made, of the Capacity or Integrity of those whom he has consulted? May he not be *deceiv'd*, in the false Glosses he has put upon the *Holy Scriptures*, in Opposition to the universal Harmony, and Consent of much Wiser, Learned, and perhaps Honester Men than himself? May he not take that for a *Principle of Conscience*, or at least Endeavour to obtrude it upon others, which is nothing else, but the Produce of *Ignorance, Ambition, Prejudice or Self Conceit*? Or do's he hope to Excuse himself to an *All-Seeing God*, by pleading *Sincerity*, for sanctifying a suppos'd *Principle*, which (for any thing he knows to the contrary) may be laid aside to Morrow? Especially if we consider, that in a great many *Cases*, a Man is not a competent Judge even of his own *Sincerity*, no more than of his own *Knowledge*: I might convince you of this, by several Instances, but I shall pitch upon one that is obvious,
and

and if rightly attended to, should make us have a very mean and low Opinion of our own *private Judgment*, and oblige every one of us, to imite *on his Breast*, and cry out with the *Publican*, *God be merciful to me a Sinner.*

That which I mean, is the *Sincerity* of a Man's *Repentance* upon his *Bed of Sickness*, which is a Time, when least of all it is liable to Suspicion. For here the Sick Person groans, under the weighty Remembrance of his former Sins, which cry aloud to Heaven for *Vengeance*. Here the Pains of Death compass him about, and the Gates of Hell, stand as it were open, and ready to receive him : Here his Head is a *Well of Water*, and his Eyes as *Fountains of Tears*, lamenting and bewailing his past Folly, and crying unto the Lord, in the Words of our Saviour's *Disciples*, *Lord save me, or else I Perish* ; and at this Time, if at any, a Man might be allow'd to be a competent Judge of his *Sincerity*. Let us see then the consequence of this Repentance, The Lord bears his Prayer, and his Cry comes unto him.

him. He delivers his Soul from Death, his Eyes from Tears, and his Feet from falling, and yet the last State of this Man is worse than the first. For upon his Deliverance and Recovery, all his pretended Sincerity, and strong Resolutions, and solemn Promises of Amendment, do vanish and come to nothing, His Righteousness hath been as the Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew, which passeth away; He returns with the Dog to his Vomit, and with the Sow which was wash'd, to her wallowing again in the Mire; and though the Man himself thought, that his Repentance was Sincere, yet the Consequence proves it to have been otherwise, and God knew it to be insincere, though he himself was Ignorant of it.

From all which I infer, that if no Man can be a competent Judge, either of his own Knowledge, or of all the Means necessary for informing his Conscience. If he have no fix'd and immutable Standard, by which he can certainly know, that he will never alter his Opinion in those Matters, relating to Conscience and Salvation. And
last

last of all, if no Man can be a competent Judge of his Sincerity in those Things, wherein he opposes his own *private Judgment* to the *Authority* of the Church of Christ, then I say, a Man by opposing it, *Reigns not in Christ's Kingdom, but in his own*, and I may apply to him, the Words of the Prophet Jer. ii. 13, *that he has forsaken the Fountain of Living Waters, and hewn out to himself a broken Cistern that can hold no Water*; by renouncing those Truths, which could not proceed but from the greatest Degree of Sincerity, (as being deliver'd and taught by the Church, when Labouring under the hottest Persecutions;) and substituting his own *private Judgment*, in their Room, by which he at once deludes himself, and imposes upon the Minds of weak and unsettled Christians.

From all that I have hitherto said in Vindication of the Church's Authority, for interpreting of Scripture; I might reasonably infer the Truth of that Article, which she teaches us to believe concerning the Ever-
blessed

bleſſed Trinity: * But, having formerly confirm'd this Doctrine, and ^{* It being Trinity Sunday} it being too copious a Subject to be inſiſted on at this Time,

I ſhall proceed to the *Second Objection*, which I mention'd, whereby it is pretended that *Temporal Rewards or Punishments*, and all worldly *Conſiderations*, are inconfiſtent with the nature of *Chriſt's Kingdom or Church*, which is *Spiritual*. I have in my former Diſcourſe Solv'd this Objection, ſo far as Religion is concern'd, and am very unwilling to enter upon any political Conſideration, which I am ſo great a Stranger to, and hitherto have never troubled this Audience with, as being improper for ſuch a place. But there being ſomething in it which regards our *Conſtitution*; I beg leave to make one or two ſhort Obſervations upon it, not ſo much of a political Nature, as what common Senſe and Reaſon dictate to a Man.

And *Fiſt* if it be true, as ſome People pretend, that all *wordly Conſiderations* ſhou'd be excluded, as being inconfiſtent with the Nature of *Chriſt's Kingdom which is Spiritual*, I wou'd gladly know what was the meaning of the late *War*, which we begun and carried on ſo Succeſſfully, at a vaſt Expence of the *Blood and Treafure* of the Nation. For we

C

have

have been told, that it was in Defence and Maintainance of our *Religious*, as well as *Civil Rights*; and I think that there is something of a *worldly Consideration* in this.

If such a frugal *Doctrine* had been preach'd some Years ago, it wou'd have been of great use to the *Nation*, if they had believ'd it, but wise Men know best how to time Things.

In the 2d. part of this Objection, there is something intimated, as if to *Exclude* some People from a share of the *Government*, on the Account of a *Religious Consideration*, were highly unreasonable in it self, and inconsistent with the nature of *Christ's Kingdom*. Now as to this; what measures the *supream Legislature* takes for preserving it self, and the *Constitution*, ought to be acquiesc'd in, and submitted to, in my Opinion, by every private Person, if he make a right use of his private Judgment; and those who do otherwise deserve a *Publick* one. But if one may be allow'd, to vindicate this Exclusion of some People; I think there is nothing in it, but what is highly consistent with *Reason*, *Justice*, and *Religion*. For on a supposition that there must be some fix'd and settled Government in every Nation, and that the Government of the State is Calculated for the Preservation of

of the *Church*, and that of the *Church* Reciprocally for the Preservation of the *State*, (as in the present Case we must suppose it to be) the Plain and Natural inference is this, that to admit any one to have a share in the one, who is an *Enemy* to the other, is what is inconsistent with common Sense, as well as with the Nature of our *Constitution*, and the true way to have perpetual Convulsions and Divisions both in *Church* and *State*.

I proceed now in the *Third Place* to consider, that Objection by which we are told, that for the *Church* to assume an Authority of interpreting the *Laws of Christ*, and of imposing her Sense of them, on the *Consciences of Men*; is what destroys the very Basis, and ground Work of the *Reformation*, when every Man had a Right to, and did actually Judge for himself, and with the same Breath almost we are told, that the *Church of England* † is a Noble Part
* Answer to Dr. Snape: p. 44.
 of the *Catholick Church*, Founded upon the Noble Claim of the Right of *Christians* to Judge for themselves: Now to convince you that there is a Complication of *Sophisms* and *Contradictions* in this Assertion, be pleas'd to consider with me.

First of all in general, that to state private Judgment, in Opposition to Authority, is very

unfair, and unreasonable; seeing in a great many Cases, *Authority* it self, is nothing else, but the Union and Harmony of many *private Judgments* together, confirm'd by the *Royal Sanction*. A plain Instance of this, are the most of our *Laws and Acts of Parliament*; notwithstanding they depend at first upon *private Judgment*, and every Member of the *Legislature*, has a freedom and Liberty of giving his *Vote*; yet afterwards, no Man is left to his *private Judgment*; neither will that excuse him, if it clash with, and contradict those *Laws*, in the Making of which he himself has concur'd. To illustrate this by a very familiar instance; There was a time when every Man had a privilege of giving his Opinion whether or not the Crown should be Settled in the present *Royal Family*, to whom we owe so many Blessings, and whose preservation, every true Subject, must look upon to be inseparable from that of our *Church and State*; but will any Man infer from hence, that he has still a privilege of *Voting*, and a Right to that *Noble Claim* of *judging for himself* in Opposition to *Publick Authority*? I think none will have the Confidence to say so.

Now this one *Reflection*, paves the way, for reconciling *private Judgment* to the *Authori-*

ty of the Church, notwithstanding every one had a Privilege of Judging for himself, at the Reformation. For it was not one private Judgment that made the Reformation, but the Union, Harmony and Concurrence of many together, who no sooner threw off the Yoak of the Romish Tyranny, but immediately they enter'd into Articles and Conditions; they made Canons, Confessions of Faith, and Catechisms for preventing Confusion and Anarchy, in the Church of Christ. Hence we have the Geneva Confession of Faith; that of Ausburg; and even among the Socinians; The Rhakovian Catechism and Confession, to which they all adhere according to their different Denominations.

No Person was compell'd by Force and Violence, or by any Unchristian and Persecuting Methods, to join in their Communion; He was left to his own choice, and the use of his own private Judgment; but then if he thought fit to Associate with them, and to list himself a Member of their Communion, it was upon Condition that he should Absolutely submit to their Interpretation of Scripture as set forth in their Catechisms and Confessions of Faith. He was no longer to make use of his own private Judgment in Opposition to
their

their *Authority*, or if he did, he was at Liberty to relinquish their *Communion*, and to go where he thought fit, as others in the like Circumstances may do, if they have a mind to it, and I'll engage that no Body will quarrel with them, for making so good an use of their *private Judgment*.

Now if in all this succinct Account of the *Reformation*, which I have given you, there be any thing inconsistent with Sense Reason, or Religion ; I appeal to every one, who pretend to have any themselves.

But 2dly, as to the *Reformation* of the Church of England, which then was, and at this Day continues, the noblest and brightest Ornament of it ; can any Man say that She shook off the *Authority* of the Church ? if he mean the *Authority* of the Church of Rome, 'tis certain She did, and had good Reason for it, because the Church of Rome, had no legal or warrantable *Authority* over her, but then, she insisted upon the *Authority* of the *Primitive Church*, from which the *Romish Church* had deviated, in a very remarkable manner, namely in *Doctrine*, *Discipline*, and *Worship* ; and this we charge the Church

Church of Rome with, and are ready on all Occasions to prove it against her. but how can it be so much as insinuated, that our Reformation in England was founded on private Judgment, in exclusion of the Church's Authority? When Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; with the Concurrence of the Civil Power, did carry on this great Work, and brought the Authority of the Church along with them, having all the Essentials and ingredients within themselves, necessary to the Constitution of a Christian Church.

So that I am amaz'd, and at a stand to read in some Peoples Work at one Time, that the Church of England is a noble Part of the Catholick Church; which is very true, indeed, and at another. That this Catholick Church is a number of Persons, whether small or great, Dispers'd or United without Authority, Laws or Canons for preserving their Unity in Communion. So that by joining both together, all the Compliment that is paid the Church of England, amounts only to this, that She is a Noble part of a Number of Christians, whether small or great, whether Dispers'd or United, founded upon the Noble Claim of the Right
of

of Christians to Judge for themselves; and if any Man pretend to understand this Definition, I congratulate him upon the Occasion; but will never envy his Happiness, seeing I confels my self entirely ignorant of the meaning of it.

I proceed now in the last place to the Third particular I propos'd to Consider, namely, the Punishment Inflicted by the Church on obstinate and impenitent Offenders.

But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man, and a Publican; And in this I shall be but very brief, because it implies no more than this, namely the Excluding a Contumacious Offender from the Church's Communion, and looking upon him to be no better than a Heathen and a Publican with whom the Jews entertain'd no sort of intercourse or Correspondence. And that our Saviour confer'd this Power of Absolving and Retaining on his Church, is evident from the Verse immediately following my Text, where he tells us, *Verily I say unto, whatsoever ye Bind on Earth, shall be Bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye Loose on Earth shall be loos'd in Heaven.* Which is a certain proof, that no Man has a Right to make use of his private Judgment, to
fo

so vile a purpose, as to call *Excommunications*, *Authoritative Benedictions*, and *Absolutions*, (which were of our Blessed Lord's own Institution) *Dreams*, *Inventions of Men*, and *humane Engines*.

This Power was continued in the Church in the Time of the Apostles, as is evident from an infinite Number of Passages in St. Paul's Epistles, and that the Primitive Church in the best and purest Ages of Christianity, exercis'd the same Power, appears from all those *Canons of Councils*, and *Writings* of the Primitive Fathers, which regard the *Discipline* of the Church, by which *Spiritual Censures* were inflicted on impenitent Offenders, especially on those who denied the Church's Power, in this Particular. But having a Design to explain and prove all this to you at greater Length on another Occasion.

I shall not insist any longer upon it, but only beg leave to draw a short Inference from what has been said, and then to conclude.

And now in good Earnest, what can be the Meaning, and Design, of all this Noise and Bustle about opposing *private Judgment* to the Authority of the Church?

D

Do

Do they mean the *Church of Rome*? I think every one will concur in this, and there is no great Necessity for recommending it, seeing we have done it sufficiently already? Or do they mean setting up *private Judgment*, in opposition to any *Foreign Reformed Church*; to this I say, that while others endeavour, to discover their *Mother's Nakedness* at Home, let us make it our Business, to cover that of our Brethren abroad? Is this *Doctrine* inculcated upon our most Gracious King? I do not understand how this is consistent with the common Rules of Decency or good Sense, that his Majesty should be advis'd, to dispute the Power of that Church, whose Authority is acknowledg'd (in a great Measure) to depend upon himself as Head and Supream under Christ.

Is it recommended to any of his Subjects, who are of that Church's Communion, of which he is the Head and Protector? I am of Opinion, that this is a very unaccountable Way, for a Man to express his Duty to his Prince, by perswading his Subjects to have an indifferent, and mean Opinion of his Authority. What can the meaning then of all

all this be? Perhaps I have found it out by that Noble Claim, of Christians judging for themselves. But lest I should be mistaken, I do not think it necessary, to tell it to those, who I believe, are more competent Judges of this Matter, than my self.

However, once for all, to convince you that I am no Friend to *implicite Faith*, nor an Enemy to private Judgment, of which I have been endeavouring, to make the best use I could, I shall Exhort you all in the Words of St. John, with which I shall conclude, Beloved believe not every Spirit,

I Ep. 4. Ch.
v. 1.

but try the Spirits whether they are of God, because many FALSE PROPHETS are gone out into the World.

Now to God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be ascrib'd all Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion, both now and evermore. Amen.

St. Margaret's, June
the 16th, 1717.

F I N I S.

all this be? Perhaps I have found it out by
that Noble Chain of Christian Judging for them-
selves. But lest I should be mistaken, I do
not think it necessary to tell it to those, who
I believe, are more competent Judges of
this Matter, than my self.

However, once for all, to convince you
that I am no Friend to impious Faith, nor an
Enemy to private Judgement, of which I have
been endeavouring, to make the best use I
could, I shall expose you all in the Words of

S. Job, with which I shall con-
clude. Blessed be the Spirit which is of God, be-
cause many FALSE TESTIMONIES are gone
out into the World.



Now to God the Father, Son and Holy
Ghost, be ascribed all Praise, Might,
Majesty and Dominion, both now and
evermore. Amen.

St. Margaret, June
the 18th, 1717.

E I N I S

E R A T A in the second Edition. P. 11. l. 14. for with. r. Works